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SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XXXX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA

CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO

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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

- [1](#)1. Mideast
- [1](#)2. Turkish Elections: AKP Victory

Key stories in the media:

The media reported that former British PM Tony Blair, the Quartet's special envoy to the Middle East peace process, is scheduled to arrive in the country today for a series of meetings on Tuesday in Jerusalem and Ramallah. Ha'aretz quoted Israeli political sources as saying on Sunday that he is expected to stray from his mandate and try to further diplomatic talks between Israel and the Palestinians. Ha'aretz quoted sources in the Foreign Ministry as saying that Blair is unlikely to deal with "technical" matters -- building institutions and mobilizing the support of donor countries -- instead he will focus on furthering the peace process. Ha'aretz quoted a political source in Jerusalem as saying on Sunday: "From this point of view, Israel is less enthusiastic." The Jerusalem Post reported that Israel made clear on Sunday that Jerusalem would oppose a widening of Blair's mandate to include a dialogue with Hamas. Maariv cited assessments which concluded that Blair will demand that Israel make significant gestures to the Palestinians.

Ha'aretz reported that on Sunday FM Tzipi Livni met with Palestinian FM Salam Fayyad in Jerusalem in the latest of a series of bilateral and multilateral talks aimed at reviving the stalled Middle East peace process. Ha'aretz and The Jerusalem Post reported that on Sunday Knesset Speaker Dalia Itzik held separate meetings with Jordanian FM Abdelelah al-Khatib and PA Chairman [President] Mahmoud Abbas. Media reported that Jordan's King Abdullah II will meet President Bush in Washington on Tuesday. On Sunday Ha'aretz printed an interview conducted last Sunday with Palestinian FM Salam Fayyad, in which he stated his belief that only an international presence in the territories will bring about the necessary change. Ha'aretz (Akiva Eldar) said that Fayyad "speaks the same lingo as the current US administration."

On Sunday Maariv reported that the government has decided to "dry up" the settlements by moving the World Zionist Organization's (WZO) settlement division to the Agriculture Ministry. Today Makor Rishon-Hatzofe cited a denial by the WZO's spokesman. The Jerusalem Post, which today repeated the Maariv story, said that many view the move as one more step to shift settlement activity from the West Bank to the Negev and the Galilee.

On Sunday The Jerusalem Post reported that Olmert called this weekend for direct peace talks between Israel and Syria. Over the weekend all media cited a report published on Saturday in the London-based Ash-Sharq Al-Awsat that Iran will give Syria USD 1 billion in aid for advanced weapons procurement, assistance in nuclear development, and the development of chemical weapons. In exchange, Syria wants Syria's agreement to stay outside of the Middle East peace process. Today media reported denials from Mujtaba Samareh Hashemi, a senior adviser to Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Ha'aretz quoted Hizbullah leader Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah as saying on Sunday in an interview with Al Jazeera-TV that his organization is capable of hitting every part of Israel and that it had the same capability during the Second Lebanon War.

Leading media reported on the landslide victory of Turkish PM Recep Tayyip Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) in Sunday's elections. Yediot bannered: "Islam Conquers Turkey." Yediot reported that the election results were received with mixed feelings in Jerusalem.

Leading media quoted PM Ehud Olmert as saying on Sunday that Kadima will continue to rule Israel and that he will remain prime minister after the elections. The media quoted Olmert as saying that the government is not completely responsible for protecting Sderot.

All media reported that a female college student sustained light injuries on Sunday when a Qassam rocket fired from Gaza hit the entrance to Sapir College, located near the Negev town of Sderot.

All media reported on Sunday that Israeli politicians were in uproar over the mention of the Arab term "nakba" or "catastrophe" in an official third-grade Education Ministry textbook for Arab schoolchildren.

The media reported that on Sunday Egyptian police shot and killed a Sudanese woman and seriously wounded four others in the Sinai Peninsula as they tried to sneak into Israel.

The media reported that on Sunday an IDF patrol killed two Palestinian gunmen in the northern Gaza Strip. The IDF force commander was lightly injured during the clash.

Major media reported that last night police forcibly removed scores of right-wing activists following their attempt to reach the evacuated settlement of Homesh in the northern West Bank. Leading electronic media reported that dozens of rightists infiltrated the settlement overnight and began building a synagogue there. The Jerusalem Post reported that on Sunday the IDF's Civil Administration told two Jewish families living in Hebron that they have until Friday to evacuate two shops of an abandoned Palestinian marketplace next to the Jewish Avraham Avinu complex.

On Sunday The Jerusalem Post reported that Israel's Ambassador to the US, Sallai Meridor, told the newspaper on Thursday that the world should launch a divestment campaign, such as the one carried out against South Africa in the 1980s, to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons.

The Jerusalem Post reported that over 30 American trade unions have condemned the spate of boycott initiatives by trade union movements in the UK, branding them "inimical" and questioning the motives for singling out Israel.

The Jerusalem Post and Israel Radio quoted Frances Townsend, President Bush's Homeland Security Adviser, as saying on Sunday that the US would consider using military force if necessary to stem Al-Qaida's growing ability to launch terrorist attacks.

Maariv and other major media reported that the Histadrut Labor Federation threatens a public sector strike on Wednesday.

11. Mideast:

Summary:

Arab affairs correspondent Smadar Perry wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "Officials in the Saudi King's court have demanded that senior representatives of Hamas be included in the regional peace conference."

Palestinian affairs correspondent Danny Rubinstein wrote in the left-leaning, independent Ha'aretz: "The present and future belong to those who were not [at last week's meeting of the PLO Central Committee in Ramallah], regardless of whether this means Hamas or opposition within Fatah."

Diplomatic correspondent Ben Caspit wrote on page one of the popular, pluralist Maariv: "It is not certain whether the president who succeeds George Bush will be able to repair the damage that his policy caused to the Middle East in particular and to the world in general."

The nationalist, Orthodox Makor Rishon-Hatzofe editorialized: "The moment Assad turned into Ahmadinejad's ally, we moved away from a dialogue with Syria."

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "War is eminently preventable, provided that basic steps to reduce its likelihood -- by convincing the aggressor that it will be too costly -- are taken."

Block Quotes:

1I. "Saudi Arabia Withdraws From Peace Initiative"

Arab affairs correspondent Smadar Perry wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (7/22): "Saudi Arabia is distancing itself from the Arab peace initiative, which was formulated and presented by King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia five years ago in Riyadh. As a result of King Abdullah's cold feet, and in contrast to the position of the US administration, Israel, Jordan

and Egypt, officials in the Saudi King's court have demanded that senior representatives of Hamas be included in the regional peace conference that will convene in another two months, under sponsorship of the US administration.... Officials in Amman have been monitoring with concern the reversal in the Saudi position. Over the past number of weeks, the King of Jordan had held a series of meetings with senior Israeli officials in order to advance the Saudi Arabia peace initiative, 'in the absence of the Saudis,' as explained to the Israelis. The Jordanian King called his Saudi counterpart, after the latter insisted on the re-establishment of the Fatah-Hamas unity government, and pointed out to him the serious ramifications of ignoring the international boycott of Hamas. However, it has been learned that the Saudi King insisted on including Hamas. Israel intelligence experts stress: The Saudis are frightened by the Iranian threat, which now dictates that they go underground. The Israeli security officials also noted that the report in Yediot Aharonot about the secret meeting between Olmert and Saudi National Security Adviser, Prince Bandar Bin-Sultan, increased the panic, confusion and concerns in the king's court in Riyadh. After conversing with his Saudi counterpart, King Abdullah of Jordan called President Bush and asked to meet with him urgently. The two will convene in Washington next Tuesday, with one focus of the conversation being the Saudi flight from the peace initiative.'"

II. "Abbas's Only Chance"

Palestinian affairs correspondent Danny Rubinstein wrote in the left-leaning, independent Ha'aretz (7/23): "For a moment this past weekend, it seemed that Palestinian Authority Chairman Mahmoud Abbas was getting stronger, while Hamas and its leadership were in a slump. The prisoners' release was presented to the public as a success for Abbas, who was very keen to point out -- to avoid finding himself in hot water -- that Israel alone prepared the list of the released, without him or his aides knowing anything about it.... The present and future belong to those who were not [at last week's meeting of the PLO Central Committee in Ramallah], regardless of whether this means Hamas or opposition within Fatah. Such an opposition does exist, not only abroad but also in the territories, and among its spokesmen are Hani al-Hassan and Jibril Rajoub, and possibly Marwan Barghouti. They are asking to hold a dialogue with Hamas, not just fight against it. Abbas's success is greatly dependent on the political steps of the Israeli government, which is, more than anyone, responsible for his weakness. Nonetheless, Abbas must make order in Fatah, and hold a general conference and internal elections. Otherwise, he stands no chance of success."

III. "Chirps of Evil and Winds of War"

Diplomatic correspondent Ben Caspit wrote on page one of the popular, pluralist Maariv (7/22): "In the current state of affairs, one might have expected the world's responsible adult, the United States, to gird up its loins and create a formula that would be tempting enough to extricate Bashar Assad from the embrace of Iran and return him to the family of nations. Such a measure would isolate Iran, help the Americans in Iraq, dry up Hizbullah, save Lebanon, pacify the northern front, calm Israel and allow the United States and the world to focus on the Iranian nuclear threat without interference. The problem is that for some time, America has not been acting like a responsible adult. Rather it has been acting like the neighborhood bully, who is retarded, doesn't understand anything, and just runs amuck in the neighborhood, throwing punches

in every direction while the other children run away. It is not certain whether the president who succeeds George Bush will be able to repair the damage that his policy caused to the Middle East in particular and to the world in general. In order to know whether that will happen, we must try to reach January 2009 in peace or, alternatively, pray that Bush will fix what he did in a courageous, correct and penetrating move against the Iranian atom bomb."

IV. "The Threat of War Approaches"

The nationalist, Orthodox Makor Rishon-Hatzofe editorialized (7/23): "The express agreement reached in Damascus between Iran's ruler Ahmadinejad and Syrian President Bashar Assad making use of the 'axis of evil' against Israel, in effect annuls the Syrian

President's call for promoting peace with Israel.... The Syrian ruler has received promises; in exchange, of course, a 'new page' has opened in relations between the two countries. From now on the Syrian front ceases to be a quiet one. The first buds of war have been kindled in the Iranian ruler's speech that was directed at Israel. The moment Assad turned into Ahmadinejad's ally, we moved away from a dialogue with Syria. The threat of war has come closer."

IV. "How to Prevent War"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (7/23): "We do not need Assad to tell us the price of war, a price we have been paying since the reestablishment of the Jewish state almost 60 years ago. Nor do we need the endless speculation about a war with Syria that so many seem to expect will occur this coming summer, as if wars are scheduled like vacations or election campaigns..... It is the task ... of Israel and the international community to ensure that such an attack would not be in the interest of Assad's regime.... We are under no illusions that Assad is interested in [unconditional peace] negotiations, much less concluding a peace treaty. But the offer must be, and clearly is, on the table. Peace offers, however, cannot be relied upon to prevent war because Syria is not interested in peace. On the contrary, Syria fights peace with Israel with all its might, including through forces most opposed to peace with Israel, such as Hamas and Hizbullah.... The international community can also play an important role in preventing a possible Syrian miscalculation by clarifying in advance the diplomatic results of such aggression. If the Assad regime, for example, understands that an attack would be met with a European and American initiative to impose Chapter 7 sanctions on Damascus in the UN Security Council, and full backing for Israel's right to self-defense, the possibility of such an attack would be greatly reduced.... War is eminently preventable, provided that basic steps to reduce its likelihood -- by convincing the aggressor that it will be too costly -- are taken."

12. Turkish Elections: AKP Victory:

Summary:

Middle East affairs correspondent Zvi Barel wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "The key question on which the new government will be tested will be to what extent Erdogan will advance a religious agenda."

Block Quotes:

"The Storm Has Not Yet Subsided"

Middle East affairs correspondent Zvi Barel wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (7/23): "As far as Turkey is concerned the outcome [of these elections] is good news: It represents the continuation of the Socialist, pro-Western line led by Erdogan. It is also good news for the Turkish economy, which has grown 7 percent annually under the current government. The key question on which the new government will be tested will be to what extent Erdogan will advance a religious agenda that frightens the army and most of the secular public so much -- the very public that views the Justice and Development Party as a threat to the principles of Kemalism and a risk of descent into the religious chasm."